



THE WELLNESS MAGAZINE  
FOR OHIO VETERANS

FALL • 2001

# Veterans' Health

Get educated!

It's one of the best ways  
to help your health

Agent Orange  
and diabetes:

New benefits apply

Don't accept  
arthritis pain,  
defy it!



# Helping to keep you informed

From understanding complex medical conditions to finding the right person to answer your question, it takes real effort to stay on top of your health. But here at VISN 10, we offer several resources to help make the task easier:

- **Patient Education Resource Centers.** Each of our medical centers has a Patient Education Resource Center where you can research health topics. To learn more about the services available and tips for working with your doctor, read “Educate Yourself!” on page 6.
- ***Veterans’ Health.*** Of course, this newsletter is another tool we use to keep you up to date on health happenings. For example, diabetes may now be service-connected for veterans exposed to Agent Orange or other herbicides. See the next page to find out if you qualify.
- **VA staff.** While your primary care provider is a main source of information and support, don’t forget about others who may be able to help you. For example, pharmacists can answer questions about prescription and over-the-counter medications as well as herbal supplements. To learn more about alternative therapies for arthritis, as well as traditional treatments, see page 4.

As always, if you ever have any question, just ask. We are here to help.



—Steven Cohen, M.D.,  
Acting Network Director

#### CORRECTION

In the Benefit Plan that was published with the last issue of *Veterans’ Health*, there was an error regarding nursing home services. VA will provide nursing home services for eligible veterans who are in need of nursing home care and are 70 percent or above service-connected or in need of nursing home care for a service-connected disability (some copayments may apply). We apologize for any confusion this may have caused.

*Veterans’ Health* is published quarterly as a patient education service by VA Healthcare System of Ohio, one of the 22 integrated networks of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The publication is intended to provide information to help you stay well, manage your healthcare and learn about the many health services available through the VA. This publication is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, which should be obtained from your doctor. All articles may be reproduced for educational purposes.

The Mission of the VA Healthcare System of Ohio is:

- To provide veterans a continuum of care that is accessible, value-added and cost-effective, and of the highest quality, within an environment of outstanding education and research.
- To promote a culture that supports and develops a caring, compassionate, competent and quality-oriented workforce.

COVER PHOTO: MARK ARLINGHAUS, PHOTOGRAPHER, CINCINNATI VA CAMPUS.

Pictured on the cover is Duncan Von Peed, a veteran and patient of Cincinnati VA Campus since 1993 when he was diagnosed with multiple myeloma. He has been treated successfully and was able to finish the National Multiple Sclerosis Society 2001 MS Bike Tour. He biked the two-day 150-mile tour, raising more than \$1,200 for MS. Congratulations, Mr. Von Peed.



Local VA  
hospital exceeds  
expectations

What do you think when someone is in the Veterans’ Administration hospital? You may have the same pre-conceived notion I had, and it was not a pretty picture. I would like to set the picture straight.

My dad is a WWII veteran. Because he has many health problems, which are now complicated by serious memory loss and the cost of treatment, a friend suggested the Cincinnati VA. As his health and memory continued to deteriorate, I began to accompany Dad and Mom to his appointments at the hospital. I realized very quickly that my dad was receiving excellent attention from a professional and caring staff. As his needs worsened, Dad was admitted to the VA hospital. The staff has been working with my dad now for about two weeks, providing one-on-one care for hours at a time. Although Dad is not going to get better, he is feeling better.

Thanks to everyone at the Cincinnati VA—and especially those presently taking care of my dad on Seventh South—for making a very difficult time for our family a little easier. If your mental picture of our VA was like mine, I hope this helps re-draw it.

Chris Baker, *Bridgetown*

#### *Veterans’ Health* Editorial Directors

Suzanne Tate  
Cincinnati VA Campus

Judy Nassmacher  
Dayton VA Campus

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VA Healthcare System of Ohio



# Agent Orange and diabetes: A link is established

**V**ietnam veterans with type 2 diabetes may now be eligible for disability compensation under new VA rules. Research has shown limited/suggestive evidence of a link between type 2 diabetes and Agent Orange and other herbicides used in Vietnam. Limited/suggestive evidence means that at least one major study has found such a link.

## What is diabetes?

In type 2 diabetes, your body can't process blood sugar, called glucose, properly. It happens when insulin, the hormone that helps process this sugar, is unable to do its job. As a result, extra glucose is left in the blood.

About 16 percent of the patients treated by VA have diabetes. And about 200,000 Vietnam veterans have type 2 diabetes.

Agent Orange appears to raise diabetes risk only slightly. Family history of the disease, physical inactivity and obesity remain the most important risk factors.

## What benefits are now available?

The benefits a veteran may receive will depend on the severity of his or her illness. Bob McGlaughlin, assistant chief of patient business services and enrollment coordinator at the Cincinnati campus, advises veterans to contact a VA Regional Office to begin a claim. Call 1-800-827-1000 for the Regional Office closest to you.

Veterans may need to undergo a compensation and pension exam unless they have medical records detailing their illness. And veterans who were previously denied compensation should reapply to see if they are eligible.

The list of diseases associated with Agent Orange continues to grow. Conditions service-connected for Vietnam veterans include chloracne (a skin disorder); porphyria cutanea tarda (a liver disorder); acute or subacute peripheral neuropathy (a nerve disorder); and certain cancers, including non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, soft tissue sarcoma, Hodgkin's disease, multiple myeloma, prostate cancer and respiratory cancers. **VH**

## Back pain relief



**M**any people live with back pain even though many effective treatments are available, including drugs, special back exercises, spinal manipulation and surgery.

If you suffer from back pain, you should know that VA health benefits include coverage of chiropractic treatment, which is based on the idea that good health depends on a normally functioning spine and nervous system.

Physicians performing these services are called

doctors of chiropractic and are licensed by the state in which they practice. Chiropractors pay special attention to the spine, arms and legs and the nervous, muscle and skeletal systems. They often use their hands to manipulate, or adjust, the spine. Massage, mobilization and advice on exercise and nutrition are also key elements of treatment.

The VA will only pay for chiropractic services related to manipulation of the spine. If your primary care provider decides it is necessary and will benefit you, he or she will arrange the necessary referral. In some cases, you may be required to see a VA specialist for rehabilitation therapy before being referred to a chiropractor. **VH**

# Don't accept arthritis



**T**he word arthritis means “joint inflammation.” Sounds simple enough, yet hidden behind so generic a term are more than 100 different diseases. Although the most common types of arthritis—osteoarthritis (OA), rheumatoid arthritis (RA) and gout—are distinct conditions, they all have one thing in common: pain. If arthritis is making it hard for you to get through the day, try these tips:

1. See your doctor promptly. Left untreated, some forms of arthritis, including OA, RA and gout, can be crippling. Prompt diagnosis and proper treatment can prevent joint deformities, relieve pain and improve

mobility. Call your doctor if one or more of these symptoms persists for two weeks:

- joint stiffness lasting 30 minutes or longer
- constant or intermittent joint pain or tenderness
- difficulty moving a joint normally
- swelling, redness or warmth in one or more joints.

2. Manage your disease. Work with your doctor to plan your treatment. Enroll in self-help classes and contact groups that offer information, such as the National Arthritis Foundation (1-800-283-7800).

3. Bolster your emotional health. Fear, anger and worry can heighten pain perception.

# pain, defy it!

And sometimes despair can be more debilitating than the arthritis itself. In contrast, friendship, hobbies and an upbeat, independent attitude can distract you from discomfort. Relaxation techniques, hypnosis and counseling can lift your spirits. And you will benefit

from doing as much as possible on your own rather than relying on others.

4. Balance rest with exercise. Physical activity can help you look, sleep and feel better. It also releases your body's natural painkillers and can reduce the fatigue. Ask your doctor to suggest

exercises to build muscles around joints and increase range of motion. Many people with arthritis find water exercises soothing.

5. Use heat or cold treatments. Hot compresses, warm baths, heated pools, heating pads and paraffin baths may relax muscles and stimulate circulation. Cold packs, on the other hand, may numb hot, swollen joints during acute attacks. For optimal relief, follow these tips:

- Always place a towel between your skin and the heat or cold source.
- Always remove the heat or cold source after 20 minutes.
- Never apply heat or cold to sore or sensitive skin.
- Never combine analgesic rubs with heat; the combination can burn your skin.

6. Ask your doctor about physical and occupational therapies. Therapists can provide education about pain relief.

7. Talk to your doctor about medications. Drug treatments vary depending on the underlying cause of arthritis. **VH**

## Arthritis alternatives

**A**mericans spend more than \$1 billion a year on alternative treatments for arthritis. One of the most popular, glucosamine, has shown promise.

Glucosamine is found naturally in your body and helps strengthen cartilage. Synthetic glucosamine is sold as dietary supplements to help treat osteoarthritis. Proponents believe it lessens pain and improves movement by helping grow new joint cartilage and maintain existing cartilage.

To boost its effectiveness, glucosamine is often taken with chondroitin. Christine Edie, clinical pharmacy specialist at the Cincinnati campus, says it can take up to a month to see the benefits.

If you'd like to try the supplements, talk to your doctor or nurse practitioner first and ask about proper dosage. "A common problem is people don't get the doses right or don't get the combination right," Edie says. She advises patients to take 500 milligrams of glucosamine three times a day. Chondroitin should be taken in 400-milligram doses three times a day. Also, look for products that list a manufacturer, lot number and expiration date on the bottle. If you are allergic to seafood, avoid glucosamine as it is made from the skeletons of some sea animals.

Be aware, too, that glucosamine may interfere with diabetes medicine. And chondroitin may make your blood thinner, which can be especially dangerous if you are taking blood-thinning medication.

Edie offers these additional suggestions for supplement use:

- Keep a symptom diary. This will help you remember why you are taking the supplement and help track its effectiveness.
- Stop taking the supplement immediately and see your doctor if you have any problems.

Other popular supplements for arthritis treatment include SAM-e and MSM. Although they appear to be safe, more research is being done on their effectiveness, so use caution.

For more information about these or other supplements, talk with your VA primary care provider or pharmacist.



# One of the best things you for your health: Educate



## Ask these questions

### ABOUT PRESCRIPTIONS

- Why do I need this medication?
- How and when am I supposed to take it and for how long?
- Are there any side effects?
- How soon should my symptoms improve?
- Are there any special instructions?
- Is it safe to take with other drugs or dietary supplements?

### ABOUT TESTS

- What will this test show?
- How accurate is it?
- Are there any risks or side effects?
- Do I need to do anything special before or after the test?
- How soon will I know the results?

### ABOUT TREATMENT

- What are the benefits and risks?
- How soon will it improve my condition?
- Are other treatments available?
- If surgery is needed, can it be done on an outpatient basis?

**Y**ou may not be a doctor or a nurse. You might not have even passed biology class. So what can you do to work with your VA healthcare provider to get the best possible care? Plenty!

Remember, you are the most important part of your healthcare team. It is your responsibility to learn about your health, medicines and treatment. Your healthcare providers are here to help and to teach you what you want and need to know.

“Patient education is any interaction that takes place between a patient and healthcare provider, providing any information that helps maintain or improve health,” says Judy Nassmacher, Health Care Education Specialist at the Dayton VA Medical Center. VISN 10 also offers many ways for you to stay informed about your health.

## Guidelines for a good relationship with your primary care provider

To give you the best possible treatment, your doctor will need you to be open and honest.

Share your history. Find out as much as you can about your family medical history and give the information to your provider.

Don't be shy. Many “personal” health problems, like incontinence or impotence, can be treated. So don't be afraid or embarrassed to discuss intimate issues. This includes your health practices and any medication, prescription and/or over-the-counter, you are taking.

# can do yourself!

Don't try to be a "good patient." If it is hard for you to follow a treatment plan, tell your doctor. Often, several treatment options are available. So if one doesn't work, it's likely another will.

Stay on top of your health between visits. Keep a list of questions that come to your mind. Also, write down things that are not normal for you. This could include pain, loss of appetite, frequent urination or light-headedness.

## Seek out information

Need to know more about a health topic? VISN 10 offers plenty of information. Each medical center has a patient education resource center or library, open Monday through Friday. There, you can find health reference materials, including books, pamphlets and videos. Material in Spanish is also available.

If you can't get to one of the centers, call and we will send information to you. See the box for the phone number of the resource center nearest you.

Each medical center also has a place where people can get Internet access. "That is another way people can learn more," Nassmacher says.

Yet another way to stay informed is with a HealthTouch kiosk—a

touch-screen machine that allows you to look up medical information and print it out for your use.

If you'd like in-depth knowledge about a medical condition, try one of our classes on topics like diabetes and smoking cessation. We also offer support groups. Contact your local patient education resource center for class schedules or to register. **VH**



## Glossary of primary care terms

- **Provider:** can refer to any of the clinical staff listed here.
- **General practitioner (G.P.):** an M.D. or doctor of osteopathy (D.O.) with a background in many areas of medicine. G.P.s are trained to treat the entire family but are not specialists.
- **Internist:** an M.D. or D.O. who specializes in internal medicine. Internists attend three or more years of postgraduate training and are expert diagnosticians.
- **Family practitioner:** an M.D. or D.O. with three years of postgraduate training in family medicine. These specialists can treat and coordinate care for children and adults.
- **Nurse practitioner (N.P.):** a registered nurse with advanced education and clinical training. N.P.s provide basic healthcare as well as diagnose, treat and monitor chronic diseases. They can prescribe medicine and refer patients to specialists.
- **Clinical nurse specialist:** a registered nurse with a master's degree in a particular specialty, such as cardiology or psychiatry. Clinical nurse specialists are trained to diagnose, treat and monitor diseases in their specific area. Some may also prescribe medications.
- **Physician assistant (P.A.):** a licensed healthcare professional with a general education in primary care. P.A.s can treat many basic conditions, provide screenings and instruct patients on disease prevention.

## How to contact your patient education resource center

CHILLICOTHE: 740-773-1141, ext. 6230

CINCINNATI: 513-861-3100, ext. 4188

CLEVELAND:

Brecksville, 440-526-3030, ext. 6250  
Wade Park, 216-791-3800, ext. 5192

COLUMBUS: 614-257-2119

DAYTON: 937-268-6511, ext. 2312

# Reaching Us Is Easy

Keep this information handy—when you need us, we'll be there.

## Akron VA Campus

676 South Broadway Street  
Akron, OH 44311  
330-344-4177

## Athens VA Campus

510 West Union Street  
Athens, OH 45701  
740-593-7314

## Bellevue VA Campus

103 Landmark Drive  
Bellevue, KY 41073  
859-392-3840

## Brecksville VA Campus

10000 Brecksville Road  
Brecksville, OH 44141  
216-526-3030

## Canton VA Campus

221 3rd Street SE  
Canton, OH 44702  
330-489-4660

## Chillicothe VA Campus

17273 State Route 104  
Chillicothe, OH 45601  
740-773-1141

## Cincinnati VA Campus

3200 Vine Street  
Cincinnati, OH 45220  
513-861-3100

## Clermont County VA Campus

Suite 270  
4355 Ferguson Drive  
Cincinnati, OH 45245  
859-392-3853

## Columbus VA Campus

543 Taylor Avenue  
Columbus, OH 43203  
614-257-5200

## Dayton VA Campus

4100 West Third Street  
Dayton, OH 45428  
937-268-6511

## East Liverpool VA Campus

332 West 6th Street  
East Liverpool, OH 43920  
330-386-4303

## Ft. Thomas VA Campus

1000 So. Ft. Thomas Avenue  
Ft. Thomas, KY 41075  
606-572-6202

## Grove City VA Campus

1953 Ohio Avenue  
Grove City, OH 43123  
614-257-5800

## Hillsboro VA Campus

135 North High Street  
Hillsboro, OH 45133  
937-393-8176

## Lancaster VA Campus

1550 Sheridan Drive  
Colonnade Medical Building  
Lancaster, OH 43130  
740-653-6145

## Lawrenceburg VA Campus

710 W. Eads Parkway  
Lawrenceburg, IN 47025  
812-539-2313

## Lima Campus

1220 E. Elm St.  
Lima, OH 45804  
419-227-9676

## Lorain VA Campus

205 West 20th Street  
Lorain, OH 44052  
440-244-3834

## Louis Stokes VA Campus

10701 East Boulevard  
Cleveland, OH 44106  
216-791-3800

## Mansfield VA Campus

1456 Park Avenue West  
Mansfield, OH 44906  
419-529-4602

## Marietta VA Campus

418 Colegate Drive  
Marietta, OH 45750  
740-568-0415

## McCafferty VA Campus

4242 Lorain Avenue  
Cleveland, OH 44113  
216-939-0699

## Middletown VA Campus

675 North University Blvd.  
Middletown, OH 45042  
513-423-8387

## New Philadelphia VA Campus

1260 Monroe Avenue  
Suite 15H  
New Philadelphia, OH 44663  
330-602-5339

## Otis Moss/University Hospital VA Campus

8819 Quincy Avenue  
Cleveland, OH 44106  
216-721-7221

## Painesville VA Campus

W 7 Jackson Street  
Painesville, OH 44077  
440-357-6740

## Portsmouth VA Campus

621 Broadway Street  
Portsmouth, OH 45662  
740-353-3236

## Ravenna VA Campus

Medical Arts Boulevard  
Suite 11A  
6693 North Chestnut Street  
Ravenna, OH 44266  
330-296-3641

## Richmond/Hagerstown VA Campus

Nettle Creek Health Center  
State Route 1  
Hagerstown, IN 47346  
765-489-3950

## Sandusky VA Campus

3416 Columbus Avenue  
Sandusky, OH 44870  
419-625-7350

## Springfield VA Campus

512 South Burnett Road  
Springfield, OH 45505  
937-328-3385

## Warren VA Campus

Riverside Square  
1400 Tod Avenue (NW)  
Warren, OH 44485  
330-392-0311

## Youngstown VA Campus

2031 Belmont Avenue  
Youngstown, OH 44505  
330-740-9200

## Zanesville VA Campus

840 Bethesda Drive  
Building 3A  
Zanesville, OH 43701  
740-453-7725

Call Tele-Nurse at 1-888-838-6446. • Visit us online at: [www.va.gov/visn10/](http://www.va.gov/visn10/)

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Cincinnati, OH 45249



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Remember, the holiday season is coming and mail delivery may experience delays. Due to this anticipated delay, the Pharmacy Service encourages you to order your medication refills at least 21 days (rather than the normal 14 days) in advance.